1 MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE
Received
1.1 Membership and Terms of Reference of the Student Experience and Widening Participation committee (SEWPC 2014 01)
Noted
1.2 With so many developments and opportunities in play, SEWPC’s remit and membership is changing. The Committee will keep its formal Terms of Reference and Scheme of Membership documents under review and will come back with a formal proposal to Academic Board.

2 MINUTES
Received and Confirmed
2.1 The minutes of the meeting of the 22 May 2014

3 REPORT TO THE ACADEMIC BOARD
Received and Noted
3.1 The report of the Student Experience and Widening Participation Committee to the Academic Board following its meeting of the 22 May 2014 (SEWPC 2014 02)

4 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY
Noted
4.1 Both financially and in terms of staff numbers significant resources have been allocated by the College for the purposes of enhancing and developing student engagement. The Committee recognised that it is now the appropriate time to bring together these ongoing works and present a coherent position and strategy on student engagement.
4.2 The new student engagement strategy would draw together expertise, projects and resource from many parts of the College and will address all aspects of the student experience aside from learning and teaching. This includes space, services, systems and support and feedback from students, Schools, Professional Services, Academic Staff. The strategy will be seamless from the student perspective and fitting for the unique Birkbeck student experience.

4.3 Members were keen to note that the strategy would not just address the student experience inside the classroom, but outside as well; with considerations ranging from effective administrative systems to the utilisation of student complaints as a feedback tool.

4.4 SEWPC members noted the recently developed Research Strategy 2014-19 which has a two part format of principles and implementation; and agreed to develop a document with a similar structure, with a rich introductory narrative about the importance, value and special quality of student engagement at Birkbeck.

4.5 Various influencers and contributing factors would be involved, allowing for proposed strands of the strategy to be prioritised and resources allocated. It is envisioned that by the next meeting of SEWPC there would be a first draft of a vision to discuss and by the October 2015 meeting of SEWPC there would be a clear vision with prioritised strands.

5 MENTORING

Noted

5.1 The Mentoring Scheme is currently a joint initiative between the Alumnus team and BEI. It has operated for four years during which the number of students being mentored has grown from ten to 50.

5.2 In its previous year the scheme hosted 51 Business School alumni mentors from a broad mix of professions, of which 60% were male and 40% were female. 28 of these mentors were sourced from Birkbeck’s corporate partner Credit Suisse and were mainly middle managers. In its previous year the scheme hosted 89 students.

5.3 This year 102 applications have been received from students, of which 60% are female and 40% are male; 59% are under 30, 51% are in employment and 23% receive some sort of financial support.

5.4 The scheme is based on establishing one to one mentoring relationships, over six months, with the aim of developing students’ soft skills and exposing them to professional environments. Training is given to both mentors and mentees to ensure that both parties have the correct expectations of the scheme i.e. that is not a scheme designed to match individuals with a job upon completion.

5.5 Moving forward the scheme will be rolling out a pilot with the School of Law from which it has already signed seven alumni. The Committee also noted the potential for scaling the project using automation - signing up volunteer mentors from a broader range of professions and students from the other Schools and enabling the scheme to scale up.
Members asked about mentoring schemes in Arts subjects and whether the scheme could extend beyond business related subjects in the future. The Committee was informed that this should be possible, since Birkbeck's alumni database covers the full range of subjects studied in the College.

**CHAIR’S REPORT**

Noted  
6.1 The Chair noted the new opportunities emerging for Birkbeck, now that the College has successfully navigated through financial and student recruitment challenges. Birkbeck is doing well in student surveys and is making the most of relationships with other organisations, enhancing the student experience with the provision of mentorship schemes, internships and funding. There was a general consensus that now is the time to explore new avenues and establish Birkbeck's future as as a key institution with an important role in London.

**STUDENT SURVEYS**

Received and Considered  
7.1 The results of the 2014 Student Surveys and their headline outcomes *(SEWPC 2014 03)*

Noted  
7.2 The Committee noted the key themes identified from College level analysis of data from the National Student Survey (NSS), the Birkbeck Student Survey (BSS) and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES). Participation rates in the three surveys were; 55%, 11.2% and 17.1% respectively.

7.3 The paper presented included a collation of qualitative and quantitative data from all three surveys; qualitative comments from students were grouped according to category and the number of comments related to specific categories ranked in order to determine their significance, quantitative data was presented in Tableau. It was noted that the data could be cross-referred with other management information, thereby facilitating more detailed analysis.

7.4 Each of the three surveys exhibited cross cutting themes. Common positive themes included, ‘outstanding teaching’ and ‘interacting with a diverse range of students.’ Common negative themes included, ‘a lack of timely and appropriate feedback’ and ‘a lack of consistency in the high standard of administrative support expected.’

7.5 Members discussed how the outcomes of these surveys should be communicated back to students and staff. Several options, including; a summary of the data using infographics on web pages or digital boards, a formal document to be published on ‘My Birkbeck’ and a cascading communication system for staff, were put forward by members for consideration.

7.6 Feedback based on a “you said/we did” message might benefit from more subtle wording, but it is necessary to publish the information to successfully close the feedback loop and make it clear to students that the College is responsive to their concerns.
7.7 In past years the College has struggled to attain the necessary response rate for the NSS for results to be valid. Despite this Birkbeck’s results are consistently good, (with a slight dip in 2012/13): members agreed that feedback to students should coincide with the opening of surveys in spring 2015, to boost student engagement and participation in the process.

7.8 Thanks to the implementation of the Birkbeck Student Survey and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, the College now has a range of survey responses to utilise in the search to identify and optimise the Birkbeck student experience. These Birkbeck owned surveys, whilst initially mirroring the format of the NSS, could be shaped to return responses on a variety of areas.

7.9 Potential students are likely to look at the survey responses and analysis thereof in order to ascertain how student-centred Birkbeck is. It was noted that detailed marketing materials, with breakdowns in relation to Schools and subjects would be useful for both current and prospective students.

7.10 The student union representative raised the issue of lack of engagement of personal tutors as an example of negative student feedback. It was put to the committee that prompting tutors to initiate correspondence with students would be a way of demonstrating a response to feedback in a tangible way rather than by simply producing information documents. The Committee confirmed that the role of personal tutors is currently under discussion, particularly in relation to their intervention responsibilities regarding students with high absence rates.

8 ALUMNI FUND PROJECTS
Received and Considered

8.1 The recommendations for alumni fund projects for 2014-15 (SEWPC 2014 04)

8.2 The alumni fund was established in 2011 and is maintained via donations from former students and staff and friends of the College. Financial contributions are usually made on a small scale through direct debit, rather than one off larger contributions. The purpose of the fund is to support initiatives to improve the student experience.

8.3 In the last year the fund raised approximately £145,960; this money was dispersed through the following projects:
   - £103,790 for student financial support, with £33,000 specifically for postgraduate scholarships.
   - £40,000 for supporting the student centre and the My Birkbeck services.
   - £2,170 from the class of 2013, as in previous year’s class donations, was donated to the library fund.

8.4 Each year Schools, departments and professional services are invited to apply for additional funds. In the past it has been agreed that £25K would be set aside for these projects, however due to the range and strength of the applications received for 2014-15 it was recommended to the committee that a further 3K be added to this amount in order that all recommended projects be fully funded.
Approved

8.5 The increase of the alumni fund budget for projects from £25K to 28K.

8.6 The Alumni fund projects for 2014-15:
- Enabling room in the Library for assistive technology (speech input software)
- Bibliotherapy scheme
- Training for mediators
- Training for Student funding advice
- Study/work abroad options for languages students
- Space enhancements for SSHP
- PhD student/Community arts project network

Noted

8.7 Members noted that whilst projects could be approved and funding allocated, it is not within the Committee’s remit to allocate space for projects. It was confirmed that space for the library projects have already been allocated.

8.8 Concern was expressed that some of the projects are the sort that might otherwise be funded by core budgets, members were asked to consider whether there is a clear enough vision and criteria for alumni fund projects. Members were assured that the approved projects could not have been implemented without the extra funding. It was also suggested that for the next round the alumni fund may invite applications that relate to specific strands of the new strategic engagement vision and strategy.

8.9 Guidelines are published as to what makes a successful application though it was noted that this is only the fund’s second year and that information is still being collated as to what type of projects correlate with the aims of the Alumni Fund. Unsuccessful applications are likely to be those that are repeat requests for funding or replicate services already in place.

9 CAREERS SERVICE

Noted

9.1 The committee heard an update on the Birkbeck Careers Service. The College is now providing its own careers service rather than using the generic University of London service.

9.2 Several new initiatives are to be introduced in 2014-15, including; an employability space within the student centre, a programme of 45 workshops the first of which have already had positive feedback, coaching programmes and employability advisors and consultants. There is a new website http://www.bbk.ac.uk/careers/careers-service and an online student portal which has resulted in a large increase in online student engagement.

9.3 SEWPC is keen to ensure that bespoke services are developed for the three main groups of Birkbeck students; 18-24 year olds, traditional mature students and senior professional students.

10 BIRKBECK TALENT
Noted

10.1 SEWPC was informed about developments in Birkbeck Talent a pilot employment agency scheme. Following an email survey, 1300 responses were received from students wishing to be involved in the pilot, of which 600 have been selected.

10.2 The scheme has been building relationships with a wide range of potential employers with the aim of securing suitable student positions. The scheme will advertise positions on a website and the 600 pilot students will have the opportunity to apply. At the same time, recruitment administrators can search the database for suitable candidates and invited them to apply for specific jobs.

10.3 Staff will also help to facilitate interviews and obtain feedback if necessary. The pilot starts in November and the scheme plans to go live in April/May 2015. The pilot phase is free to all; for the live scheme employers will be charged a small recruitment fee if a successful candidate is sourced.

11 E-REGISTERS

Received

11.1 The E-Registers Project Report (SEWPC 2014 05)

Noted

11.2 SEWPC heard about the E-registers project taking place under the Catalyst Programme. E-registers enables automatic attendance records to be created from students touching their student cards onto a reader every time they attend class. The long term aim of this project is to collate and analyse the attendance patterns of students to enable better planning of support, as well as a less labour intensive way of allowing the College to meet its obligations to comply with Home Office student visa regulations.

11.3 The pilot scheme was launched at the beginning of 2014-15 and has already seen substantial student engagement. The pilot is being run on the LLB Law Programme and the BSc Management Programme as these courses have large student numbers and are run in a contained range of rooms.

11.4 The information gathered through the pilot will inform current discussions in the College about expectations for student attendance and how the system will interact with individual student timetables, for example; if the rule were to be that intervention would be triggered after failed attendance at three consecutive events, this rule might be unevenly applied in that for one student the three events might be in one night, whilst for another they might be over several weeks.

11.5 The next phase of the scheme would consider how the technology could be rolled out across not only Birkbeck Schools, but also other externally hired rooms.

11.6 Members noted that the technology could enable identification of students who should not be in classes, for example, due to fitness to study issues. It was confirmed that data would not be kept on the system longer than necessary. At a certain point the data will be anonymised and used to allow the College to identify patterns and historical comparisons in order to improve the system.
12 STUDENT REPRESENTATION FRAMEWORK

12.1 The committee reviewed the first draft of the Student Representation Framework; a document produced with the aim of establishing common expectations for student representation and engagement with the governance of the College. This document is also being considered by TQEC. Members agreed to circulate the document with their colleagues and return any feedback.

13 DATES OF THE NEXT MEETINGS

Noted

13.1 The dates of the next meetings of the Student Engagement and Widening Participation Committee are:
- Wednesday 28 January 2014, at 2pm
- Thursday 7 May 2014, at 2pm